TRACES OF MUSICAL HERITAGE IN FAROESE POPULAR MUSIC

Atli Kárason Petersen
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Atli Kárason Petersen
Supervisor: Guðrún Ingimundardóttir, Ph.D.
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# TABLE OF CONTENT

Table of Content ...................................................................................................................... 3
Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 4
  When does a song sound Faroese? ...................................................................................... 5
  transcribing the traditional Faroese music ........................................................................ 6
Music in the Faroes ................................................................................................................... 7
  Traditional music .................................................................................................................. 7
    Skjaldur ............................................................................................................................... 8
    Kvaði ................................................................................................................................. 8
    Danish folk ballads .......................................................................................................... 12
    Hymns (Kingo singing) ..................................................................................................... 13
    Summary ......................................................................................................................... 13
popular music in the Faroes ....................................................................................................... 14
  Other genres ....................................................................................................................... 16
The interviews .......................................................................................................................... 16
  A ........................................................................................................................................ 16
  B ........................................................................................................................................ 18
  C ........................................................................................................................................ 19
Music analysis ........................................................................................................................ 20
  A ........................................................................................................................................ 20
  B ........................................................................................................................................ 20
  C ........................................................................................................................................ 21
The musical workhorses .......................................................................................................... 22
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 22
Final thoughts .......................................................................................................................... 23
Literature .................................................................................................................................. 24
Discography ............................................................................................................................. 25
Globalization, for better or worse has for some time been the word of the day. At the same
time as the sameness rules the order of the day, and the loss of cultures and languages is
mourned by many, there seems to be an increase in the desire amongst nations, communities
and individuals to become identifiable – to acquire something that makes one stand out in the
crowd – something unique. One way is to go back to the roots, revive what can be revived of
the cultural heritage of our past, whether it is a nation, an ethnic minority, a social community
or a single human being.

During the last thirty-five years or so, the study of popular music has experienced increasing
attention. In fields such as musicology, ethnomusicology, anthropology, sociology, and
cultural studies the amount of resources put into research has been growing, and the
establishment of online forums, webpages and publications such as Journal of Popular Music
Studies and Popular Music, has contributed to bringing the focus to this often overlooked and
ignored, but yet so overwhelmingly present part of our culture.

Living in a nation as small as the Faroe Islands (50,000 inhabit., 2017), some questions have
crossed my mind: “Is the Faroese popular music unique in any way? Are there some, if any,
traces of our music heritage in the popular music that is being created in our nat
ion, and if so,
is it possible and worthwhile to try to identify?” After all, we have had a musical tradition
through this nation’s existence for more than 1000 years since the settlement of the Faroes,
which has been transformed from a being part of the common Norse culture, into an
individual variant that in many regards is unique and at the same time also may very well be
as close to the original music as any other Nordic nations' music, perhaps even closer. With
this in mind, I have set out to look a bit closer at this issue, not attempting to undertake a full
scale study of this topic, but rather to see what is out there, and to get a picture of what
challenges lie ahead, and what needs to be done to get the great picture.

One thing that has been clear from the beginning and that is that most of today’s popular
music in the Faroes is heavily influenced by what happens in the rest of the world. The
Internet and TV etc. makes it almost impossible to stay isolated from influences outside of
our own culture and therefore it is naive to expect us to be any different than most others.
And yet, I am asking these two questions:

1. Is there anything in our popular music that can be said to be fragments of our musical
heritage?
2. If so, then are the Faroese musicians conscious of this in their creative process, do they make use of it or does it appear in the music without their knowledge?

Due to the need to limited the scope of this study I have made use of my knowledge as a
native of the faroes in the selection of which genres and artists to include or leave out. I am
biased, needless to say, but I have tried to build my decisions upon objectively based criteria.
The artists not included in this study have certainly not been left out because the lack of
worthiness or quality, but simply in order to facilitate the research.
First I have left out artists that are too obvious in their use of the musical tradition. As a consequence, the foremost ambassadors of our musical legacy, artists such as Eivør, TÝR, Hamferð, Kári Sverrisson, Enekk, and more, are not included. Also I took out artists representing genres where I did expect little or no traces of traditional music being present, genres such as Country, Blues, Singer-Songwriter and R&B. And finally I made a politically incorrect decision by choosing to leave out female artists. Mainly in order to minimize the factors to considerate, when comparing the data. It most certainly is not because of the lack of female artists.

Genres such as Jazz and contemporary “classical” music have also been avoided, even though it is quite possible to imagine a piece of music from these genres becoming popular songs.

After this weeding process, carried out according to abovementined, I have contacted three Faroese artists (henceforth referred to as A, B, and C), all still active on the music scene (2017), and got permission to interview them.

The interviews are focused around these key issues:

- Thoughts and opinions around the concept of musical heritage.
- Acknowledging the use of it either consciously, or subconsciously.
- Age versus the feeling of musical heritage, musical identity.
- The significance of geographical background.

A, B, and C are born in 1947, 1966 and 1974 respectively. They have a somewhat different geographical background. B is from the Capital of the Faroes whilst the other two, A and C are from villages. They all three are largely selftaught musicians. All three have published music on CD’s and are performing regularly either solo, with their own group or in collaboration with others, on festivals and dance halls. Their music is regularly heard in the radio. It is safe to say that they are well known around the faroes.

To compare with the results from the interviews, I have studied the music of the interviewees and compared it against transcribed traditional Faroese music and attempting to find similarities that would substantiate any claim about the musical heritage being present or not

That this selection process is influenced by my own prejudices is inevitable and will, if possible, be rectified at a later stage when the time and recourses will allow for a more thorough investigation of this issue.

**WHEN DOES A SONG SOUND FAROESE?**

When Faroese folk or viking metal band Týr performs their version of ‘Ormurin langi’ or ‘Sinklars visa,’ nobody who knows those two old Faroese folk-ballads is in doubt about the national belonging of the music, nor is there likely to be any doubt in the minds of those who do not know the songs in advance that this is music with folklorical connections one way or
another. Also, when Eivør gets up on the stage and sings her own song ‘Trøllabundin’ not many in the Faroes are questioning her as the personification of the Faroese musical legacy. People from outside the Faroes may, because of their lack of knowledge, fail to connect Eivør with the Faroese musical tradition, but they may yet sense her musical expression as something else, something that creates association of ethnicity, something old and ancient.

What is it then that creates these images, and makes us natives of the Faroes so willing to embrace this music as especially Faroese and label it in a way, as an updated version of our musical legacy?

Seen with Faroese eyes it is perhaps not so interesting how foreigners experience the music from Týr, Eivør or other Faroese artists, who venture out into the world trying to create a career for themself, some with great success and others perhaps not so successful, as it is to understand how we ourselves are experiencing it.

This raises the question, how is it then with the rest of our music, in this case, our popular music? Is there anything in there that we, the Faroese will recognize as elements of our traditional music, even when the artist, the performer, or the song itself does not point us deliberately towards it as in the examples just mentioned?

The common characteristic of the artists named above is that they are clearly drawing upon their musical background, using it consciously in their creative processes as either or both the starting point or the pivot point around which their music is being shaped and moulded. This can also often be seen as a part of the image, the branding of the artist.

When it comes to identifying the remains of the legacy, the traces, it is possible to search for specific musical elements, but part of the identifiers will be subjective, they can be a question personal preferences and taste, and thus up to discussion to a certain degree.

Therefore it is so important to get information from the artists themselves about their own experience and influences in regard to the traditional music, their own story as to what has brought them to what they stand for today. Only this way will it be possible to get the greater picture regarding the impact of our musical heritage in today’s musical landscape.

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**TRANSCRIPTION THE TRADITIONAL FAROESE MUSIC**

As far as the transcriptions of the traditional Faroese music is concerned, there is no way around the vital accomplishment of late Danish musicologist Marianne Clausen (1947 – 2014). Marianne devoted the latter half of her life to the overwhelming task of preserving the legacy of Faroese traditional singing and chanting. Her works are based upon on thousands of recordings from the entire twentieth century, carried out and collected by different researchers and scholars, including herself. This epic endeavour culminated in the publication of four volumes which included more than three thousand notated examples encompassing the various ways of traditional Faroese singing and chanting. With these books the Faroes have become privileged compared to a lot of other nations, societies and cultures who may
have suffered the loss of their musical heritage before anybody managed to record it for posterity. These books are:

- Føroya kvæði: Corpus Carminum Faroensium (Hoyvík: Stíðin, 2003)
- Andlig visulög í Føroyum: Spiritual Songs in the Faroes (Hoyvík: Stíðin, 2006)
- Visulög í Føroyum: Danish Folk Ballads in the Faroes (Hoyvík: Stíðin, 2010)
- Skjaldur, rímur og ramsur: Faroese Skjaldur and Rhymes (Hoyvík: Stíðin, 2012)

**MUSIC IN THE FAROES**

**TRADITIONAL MUSIC**

When the Faroe Islands were settled by the Norse at the end of the first millennium, they must undoubtedly have brought music with them. While we do not have any hard evidence about what that music was like, we must assume that it may have been similar to the music in the rest of Scandinavia at that time. As time passed, the isolation caused by the ocean and the distance to other societies, even though there appears to have been regular contact with the outside world most of the time, must have begun to show. Music wise it could mean that the Scandinavian countries were influenced heavier and sooner by the trends from the south of Europe, at the same time as the Faroes were kept in a kind of a time pocket where the old traditions were allowed to evolve and transform at their own pace, thus producing unique variations of the music. The occasional contact with the rest of the world has of course had some effect, but most likely only to the extent of adding to the existing music, spicing it up, but not weight enough to push it away and replace it.

Traditional Faroese music is usually divided into three main groups: The skjaldur, the kvæði, and the kingo hymns. The kvæði are then subdivided into two subgroups; the Faroese kvæði and the Danish folk-ballads.

The oldest skjaldur and kvæði probably date back to the late Middle ages. Music from the time of the settlement of the Faroes and the following centuries relied on being orally handed down from generation to generation. It wasn’t until after the reformation that the transcribing of folk music began to take place, and at the beginning only in very limited form and numbers. The earliest reference to anything being written down of the Faroese music mentions a Danish antiquarian Ole Worm who in 1639 is said to have received five folk-ballads from the Faroe Islands. Clausen, (2012, p.17), states that since Ole Worm’s main objective was to collect antiquities, it is most likely that these folk-ballads may have been considered quite old by those who sent them to him. Unfortunately the manuscripts have been lost, most likely to the Copenhagen fire in 1728.1 But information exists as to which those ballads were.

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1 This disaster, in addition to leaving a great part of the city in ashes and making almost a quarter of its inhabitants homeless, also destroyed thousands of texts, many of which unique.
SKJALDUR

The skjaldur have until recently largely been overlooked or neglected, not being considered as important as the kveði or the kingo hymns. But thankfully some serious effort has now been put into the preservation of this genre, so that as many as possible of the remaining sources have been recorded and these, along with already existing recordings, have been transcribed and published.

The skjaldur’s melody usually is constructed by very simple material, a tonal range of five or six notes and even down to only three notes. This may indicate that the origin of the skjaldur can be well before the appearance of the church modes. The skjaldur can also be without a melody entirely, only consisting of the rhythm from the text as it is being recited. Not all the skjaldur are as old as mentioned above. In fact that some of them are constructed on a dorian scale or other modal frame indicating that their origin may be dated to after the reformation, but those examples rather the exception rather than the rule.

Some of the melodies of the skjaldurs may very well represent some of the oldest Faroes music in existence today, because as Marianne Clausen states: “This kind of melodies is found in folk music throughout the world and is probably the oldest way of making music.......... As many texts for the skjaldur are very old, it is possible that also the melodies have their origin in very early times; at least they are not younger than the melodies for the kveði” (Clausen, 2012, p.43).

Skjaldur or rhymes, generally with Faroese text, are often thought to be just songs for children, sung and taught by parents or grandparents. But it is not as simple as that; Skjaldur are not just nursery rhymes. In the article: “Faroese Skjaldur: An endangered Oral Tradition of the North Atlantic” the author, Stephen Pax Leonard suggests seven types of skjaldur: Faroese life, events, religious, fantastic/supernatural, nonsense, lullabies and counting rhymes (Leonard, 2010, p.12).

KVÆDI

“Our folk-ballads – or kveði, as they are usually called - form the main body of Faroes poetry in the oral tradition. They are related, by common form and distinctive content features, first and foremost to the folk ballads of the other Scandinavian countries – most closely to those of Norway – and through them to Western European folk-ballads as a whole” (Quote from Mortan Nolsøe’s article, published in Faroe Isles Review, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1977, reprinted in Clausen, 2003, p.17). All in all, more than 44.000 stanzas, or verses belonging to the kveði genre have been written down.

Texts - “The Faroese kveði is a dance-song – Faroese dance is a song-dance. The three components: words, melody, and dance, comprise a whole and none of the three can stand alone”(Clausen, 2003, p. 57)

The kveði verse has usually 4 or 2 lines with a refrain following. Or the verse can be 2 lines with an internal refrain and a following refrain. The 4 line verses are regularly constructed
with 4 accented syllables in the first line, 3 accented syllables in the second, 4 in the third, and 3 in the fourth line 4+3+4+3= 14 accented syllables. The 2 line verses are less regularly constructed and are sung with varying numbers of accented syllables, e.g. 7+6 accented syllables respectively in the two lines, or 7+7 or 7+8. The refrains to both the 4 and the 2 lined verses are of varying length and are very irregularly constructed. The verses can also have different number of lines, and some even have no refrain at all.

**Melodies** - In theory there are no pauses in a Faroese *kveði* verse and refrain, nor is there a pause between the refrain and the following verse.

The relation between the number of accented syllables in the verse and the accented parts of the melody are extremely regular. So in a 4-lined verse there are 4 beats (with quarters or dotted quarters as the time unit) in the first line, 3 beats in the second line, etc. In contrast, the long refrains are very irregular; here, an unaccented word can very well have an accented note. The refrain, where all join in, is also the most melodic and melodically stable, while the melody of the verse, often song by the song-leader, *skiparin*² alone, often consists of only a few notes, and can be quite recitative/declamatory. In contrast, on an inner level of the verse melody there is great rhythmic variation, depending upon the number of unaccented syllables in the text. At times the melody completely dissappears from the actual verse of the ballad; the text is declaimed, but with strict regard to the rhythm.

**Faroese *kveði* is unison song.** In the dance, occasionally there are moments when there appears to be two-part singing going on, but this is because of one of several conditions happening. For example if the melody is too high or too low for some voices some singers may chose to select alternative notes from the main melody. Also it can happen that *skiparin* improvises over the melody, moving away from it and by this creates the two part feeling. A third possibility is that the participants come from different villages, each with their own version of the melody “Whatever the reason, it does not alter the fact that Faroese *kveði* sung by nature is unison song” (Clausen, 2003, p.81)

**The Faroese chain dance** probably originates from the French *Carole* that had it’s prime around the years 1200. It was danced in a circle moving left and singing accompanied the dance, typically performed by a lead singer, while the dancers were singing the refrain, very similar to the Faroese dance. It is only natural that the dance has changed during the centuries since this form of dancing was spread all over Europe and reached the Faroes via England and Norway. But that does not alter the fact that the dance is fundamentally the same. (Clausen, 2010, p.37)

“**The tonality of the Faroese *kveði* present a very mixed picture**” (Clausen, 2003, p.91). As tonal material some melodies have the notes of the major scale, other major-like melodies are modally influenced, in that the scale has a low 7th step, so it resembles a Mixolydian

² Skipari, or skiparin is the song leader in the faroese chain-dance tradition. He, or she is the ultimate authority in the chain, and as long as long as his song is being sung it is considered very rude, almost blasphemic to try to take over. Skiparin is usually flanked by one or two singers on each side in the chain, who function as his supporters, and it is generally assumed that this group leads the song as the chain moves around. Skiparin begins every verse, and as soon as his voice is heard everybody else who knows the text joins in.
scale. Some melodies are minor-like, using the notes of the minor scale, while others – actually a large number of minor-like melodies – are modally influenced, with a high 6th step and low 7th step; the scale resembles the Dorian scale. In a few cases we find melodies that build on Phrygian and Lydian scales.

The material also consists of many melodies the tonally significant notes (the accented notes) of which are equal to the pentatonic scale, i.e. a 5-note scale, without the semi-tones that characterize the major and minor scales and the modal modes. As tonal basis other melodies have larger or smaller series of thirds, taken out of the pentatonic scale and possibly extended upward or downward. The basis can also be a combination of the pentatonic scale and the series of thirds, a third-dominated pentatonic scale, possibly affected by the modal modes.

The church modes reigned practically supreme in the Middle-Ages, and could be heard in liturgical music, e.g. in Gregorian chant, in folksong as well as in instrumental music; i.e. almost all European music until about 1600, when major-and minor-music began to intrude. Even older, and just as widespread, are pentatonic and tertian tonality.

In his book ‘Folkesangen på Færøerne’ (1908), Hjalmar Thuren arrived at the conclusion that the Faroese ballad melodies are mostly constructed over the pentatonic scale, while Hakon Gruner-Nielsen, in his book from 1945, ‘De færøske Kvadmelodiers Tonalitet i Middelalderen’, concentrated on the modal characteristics of the melodies as an indication of their tonality in earlier times.

Marianne Clausen agrees that both researchers partially are correct in their assumption, but claims that the tonal picture is much more complex. “It is impossible to lump all Faroese kvaði song under one heading with one tonal designation or other. One might rather say that the tonal characteristics of Western European melodies of the last 800 years or so can be rediscovered in Froese ballad melodies. However, we have no idea how the melodies really sounded in the years somewhere around 1300” (Clausen, 2003, p. 91).

**Melodic variations.** “A verse of a ballad is probably never, or rarely, sung in precisely the same way twice” (Clausen, 2003, p.79). Variations in the the melody or text are a vital part of the never-ending process of re-singing the ballad. These variations are happening spontaneously in the spur of the moment, all depending upon the mood and style of the skipari. At the same time this does not mean that a particular lead’singer is the only one using a specific variant, other lead singers may very well be using the same variants.

One way of varying the melody can be to **augment the tonal spectrum** of the melody while still staying inside the same melody. If, for instance, a melody is extended upwards by a third, the focus of the melody moves higher. Or the variations come from the so-called octave
transposition, i.s. based on one centre or the other in the melody, one can choose the notes over or under the centre, then move back again. **Octave transpositions** can be done for musical reasons, to improve the melody, or because the singer has a high or deep voice; it can be a necessity, if for instance, one has begun by choosing a range that turns out to be too high or too low. The part of the melody varied in this manner can again be varied, giving a high and a deep version.

A third variation is to make the verse more and more **declamatory and recitative** during the course of the ballad; the tonal range becomes smaller and smaller, perhaps as the singer becomes more concentrated on the text to be narrated, while the focus on the music is in the refrain. In the author’s experience the more agitated the *skipari* becomes, the more recitative the melody becomes. Some *kvaedi* melodies are quite recitative throughout, and have a small range, both in verse melody and the refrain melody. The geography also make a difference, for example are melodies in the village of Sumba on Suðuroy not necessarily recitative; on the contrary, the melodies there often have quite a wide range, up to one and a half octave with few variations in the course of a ballad.

**Rhythm**

There has not been done so much research around the rhythmical aspects of the *kvaedi*, but the two following quotes are of vital importance, because this difference is the rule rather than the exception, it defines a very contrast between what is common practice in traditional music in the Faroes and in scandinavia.

- “The rhythm in the words of the Faroese *kvaedi* is often the opposite of what one would consider natural and most correct, for example in Denmark.”
- “So Faroese *kvaedi* are typically sung with long notes on unaccented syllables and, in contrast short notes on accented syllables” (Clausen, 2003, p.99).

**Correct or wrong versions**

The following quotation is worth keeping in mind when looking at transcriptions of traditional music, it reminds us that there is indeed not only one true version of a folk-ballad, or any other traditional song for that matter, only a correct transcription of a particular version of the song or melody:

“I have sometimes had a Faroese folk-singer ask if I found that his melody or variant of a melody was “right” or “correct” and the answer must be that all variants are correct. There is no definitive answer as to how a melodic pattern is to be filled and formed; it is possible to shift between various melodic formulae, expand the line of the melody in height or depth, move parts of the melody up or down, as long as it takes place inside the framework of tradition. (E.g. chromatically rising or falling movements are not heard in the melodies to the Faroese *kvaedi*, nor in the Faroese melodies for the Danish folk-ballads; they are not part of the tradition.) A singer’s shaping of the verses in a *kvaedi* or a Danish folksong is, with all the
alterations that might appear, his or her version (in Thorkild Knudsen’s terminology\(^5\)) of the ballad. This version can mirror tradition in his home village, which usually differs from the tradition of other villages. But one tradition is no more “correct” than others. Oral tradition is by nature changeable; if tradition stiffens into a specific mould, it is no longer oral tradition.“(Clausen, 2003, p.99).

**DANISH FOLK BALLADS**

Danish folk-ballads are a considerable part of the musical heritage in the Faroes. They are Danish ballads that have come to that Faroes and have survived in the through the oral tradition and over time gained their own identity. Though they all are in essence part of the same legacy, the melodies to the Danish folk-ballads have differences from the \(kvaed\), one being that while the \(kvaed\) typically is in common time, the Danish folk-ballad very often is in odd time.

The melody for a typical 4-line verse having 14 \((4+3+4+3)\) stressed syllables will generally have 14 accented notes, just as the Faroese \(kvaed\), and as in the \(kvaed\) there are no rests in the verse or refrain, nor between these.

Some of the Danish folk-ballads contain melisma’s, but they are rather rare in the \(kvaed\).

Another difference between the Faroese \(kvaed\) and Danish ballads is that the melody line for the verse is more tuneful and melodiously stable in a Danish ballad than in a Faroese \(kvaed\). The Danish ballads mostly have short refrains and the verse melody thereby becomes more important.

The reason for the difference in the ways of singing may derive from the fact that Faroese \(kvaed\) are more difficult to sing while dancing, the reason being that it takes only half as many steps to complete the verse of a \(kvaed\) as it takes to complete the verse of a Danish ballad. A Danish ballad usually requires each new line and each stressed syllables to be danced with an accented step, while the Faroese \(kvaed\) alternates between accented and unaccented steps. Thus the lead singer must manage to present four lines of text over the duration of for example 14 steps when he sings a \(kvaed\), while a Danish ballad calls for 28 steps for executing the four lines of text. A friend from England told me, after night of participating in dancing, that it felt as if the Faroese \(kvaed\) had a double-time feel, compared to the Danish folk-ballads)

This difference has implications on the overall impression of the dance. Since the sound or the rhythm of the dance-steps are the only accompaniment to the song, the steps for the \(kvaed\) are experienced as quite varied, as accented and unaccented steps surely differ.

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\(^5\) Thorkild Knudsen (925-2007), danish musicologist, researcher and composer, collector of Faroese \(kvaed\) and Danish folk ballads. Known for his article: “Model, type and variant”, Dansk Musiktidsskrift 1961, No3, pp. 79-92, where he presents a system to look at the melodies to the Danish ballad melodies differs from the traditional music theoretical methods.
For the Danish ballads, the ongoing accented steps on stressed syllables may be perceived as rather monotonous and repetitive. There are examples where the dances for the Danish ballads are found to be a bit too dull and an extra few notes have been added to make the melody a little bit more “Faroese”.

**HYMNS (KINGO SINGING)**

The Faroese tradition of kingo singing, so named after the Danish bishop and poet Thomas Hansen Kingo (1634-1703), distinguishes itself from the other genres of Faroese folk singing by the fact that the melodies are variants and developments of the melodies used in the churches following the reformation. The melodies came to the Faroes in books such as the Gradual, which was Thomas Kingo’s melody collection, published in 1699. Most likely a minister or a priest presented the melodies to the Faroese people in church services. The congregations then formed them according to their own traditions for singing, which must have been rooted in Gregorian chant which had existed in the churches for hundreds of years. The church mode character of the Kingo melodies, the long and short melisma, and the free, unlimited, long melody lines remind us of the singing found in Catholic churches. The kvæði are not at all melismatic; on the contrary, they are strongly syllabic, and rhythmically linked to the dance, and thus never, ever rubato. The Kingo singing style could never have originated here, nor could the influence of instrumental music have been involved – there were no instruments.

**SUMMARY**

“However, the four genres do have many tonal similarities. The genres complement each other and form a coherent musical universe, which in spite of any external influence remains specifically Faroese.” (Clausen, 2012, p.43)

**Selected identifiable characteristics of the melodies to the Faroese music:**

I. **Tonality:** Mixolydian, Dorian, Aeolian, Lydian, Phrygian modes. Third dominated pentatonic scales frequent. And frequent variations inside of these frames.

II. **The rhythmical characteristic:**
   a) The short notes are often on the strong beats and the long notes on weak beats
   b) Many verse lines have the structure of 4+3+4+3 accented or strong beats
   c) The 6/8 feel with accents on 1st and 4th eight note is at least as common as the even eight note feel with accent on 1st and 3rd note.
   d) Mixing of triplets and duplets is very common
   e) The first triplet or duplet tone is always accented

III. **Melodic traits:**
   1) Limited tonal range,

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6 There are almost no mentionings of instruments in Faroes people through the ages, and no evidence has been found that can substantiate any such theory, yet. The Danish elite in Tórshavn did instruments with them to the Faroes, but they rarely had any social connection with the common man. See further explanation under the chapter “Popular Music in the Faroes”
2) Length of verse lines varying, four and three 7 accented syllables/beats

3) Jumps or leaps
   i. Thirds T-3, 3-5, 5-7
   ii. Fourth & fifths both up and down,
   iii. Octave transposition,

4) Common linear movements (assuming the note of e in e minor as tonic for simplification):
   a) Three note pattern:
      a. T-2-3-2-T (e-f#-g-f#-e)
      b. 5-6-7-6-5 (b-c#-d-c#-b)
      c. 7-T-2-T (d-e-f#-e)
   b) Two note pattern, endings (the 2nd or 7th step of the scale on a strong beat):
      a. 2-T (f#-e)
      b. 7-T (d-e, or sometimes d#-e)
   c) Five note lines:
      a. T-2-3-4-5 (e-f#-g-a-b)
      b. 5-4-3-2-T (b-a-g-f#-e)

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**POPULAR MUSIC IN THE FAROES**

Playing on musical instruments must have been rare amongst the Norse settlers of the Faroes. Though the lack of evidence does not rule out that there was instrumental playing, there have not been found any traces or remains of musical instruments in the Faroes so far, that support the idea of playing on musical instruments having been a common practice in the Faroes through the ages since the settlement.

Some references do indeed exist that mention the playing on musical instruments, but these sources are telling about the upper class using the instruments, such as the Danish families who were posted in the Capital, Tórshavn, for a limited period of time. The possibility of evidence turning up eventually that changes these assumptions can not be excluded, but at least it can be argued that instrumental playing among the Faroese has been so rare that it can not have had any significant influence on the musical tradition and evolution in the Faroes. The total dominance of the chain-dance and the rhythm of the dance steps as the only known accompaniment to the *kvæði* and the Danish ballad, may be the proof needed.

This changes at the end of the 19th century. Instrumental playing becomes more and more common, for a large part credited to Georg Caspar Hansen⁷. In the novel ‘De fortabte spillemænd’ (1950), by William Heinesen (1900 – 1991), five amateur musicians are starring

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⁷ Georg Caspar Hansen was originally from Bornholm in Denmark, he came to the Faroes in the late 1860ies. He worked mainly as a baker, but inserted a lot of time and energy in teaching the Faroese in playing string and wind instruments with great success.
as the lead characters. The story unfolds around the time of world war I. This and the establishment of the first wind band in 1903, Havnr Hornorkestur, for example, tell about new times arriving to the Faroes. The increasing number of Faroese seamen who went away and returned from visits in foreign countries also contributed to the growing knowledge of what was happening around in the world. They brought back reports of fascinating music in far away places as well as in the Nordic countries around the Faroes, and sometimes instruments, violins, guitars and accordions.

When the British occupied the Faroes at the beginning of world war 2 (April 12th, 1940), they brought with them to the islands the popular music in England of that time and there was no turning back. During the fifties, The Rock’n Roll wave hit the Faroes and the pioneers of Faroese rhythmical music, especially Simme Jacobsen and Brandur Óssursson, appeared for the first time. The attraction of the new music meant that there was no room for sentimental or nostalgic feelings towards our traditional music. The idea of a need for preservation of the old must have been quite far away in the minds of the youth of that time and the hunger for the new and exciting music overwhelming. Therefore, it can not be a surprise that the first Faroese rhythmical music of the fifties and 60ties was mainly an imitation, the copying of English and American popular music. One can speculate whether the introduction of modality into rock music in the beginning of the seventies, via the heavy metal bands of that time, e.g. Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, may have contributed to the return to our musical heritage or not. Anyway, at the end of the second millennium, terms such as ethnic or world music, folk rock and more, were coined, and now Faroese artists are immersing themselves into this fascinating universe.

The perhaps most notable exponent of the before mentioned genres in relation to the Faroes, is the Faroes/Nordic ensemble Yggdrasil, founded and lead by Kristian Blak in Tórshavn. The ensemble is known for using the Faroese folk-ballads, hymns and rhymes as inspiration; but also from ethnic material from other regions such as Inuit songs and folksongs from the Shetlands and Orkneys.

Other artists and groups, just to mention a few in this context, are Eivør, Kári Sverrisson and TÝR. Eivør has created her own platform partially building upon the Faroese musical tradition of Skjaldur and Kingo singing, but then she has taken it further and developed her own expression. Eivør is today performing regularly abroad, and recently also managed to get involved in making music for TV series. Kári Sverrisson has been, carrying out the work of preserving the Faroese skjaldur, in addition to being an experienced performer partly of the skjalur. The folk or Viking metal group TÝR has for almost twenty years been the main interpreter of our Faroese kvæði by creating their own versions of them and have gathered quite a following around the world.

About a decade ago the national radio station Kringvarp Føroya decided to make changes to its music policy. This was actually a remarkable step, because it was taken without political pressure. The significant change was that the radio decided to have at least a minimum percentage of its broadcasted time filled with Faroese music. This has ensured that almost every new Faroese musical publication at least has one opportunity of being presented
through the radio. Since at least one song from each publication makes its way to the airwaves, the public has an opportunity to get acquainted with a wide spectrum of what is being created of Faroese music. The common opinion is in this way based on a broader basis than it would have been if there was an editorial censorship in selecting what was broadcasted. Of course the choices made as to which songs to broadcast or not are under constant criticism, as it should be. The independent, commercially based Rás 2 follows closely in this policy, although the share of Faroese material seems to be somewhat smaller.

The diversity of popular music in the Faroes is made up of multiple genres, Country, Rock’n Roll, heavy Metal, Gospel, Scandinavian dance band music, Blues, R&B, Singer song writer, Jazz, Fusion and World music and more. Obviously some of these genres are borderline cases compared with the most popular ones, but they have nevertheless been put on this list because of their sharing of the same airspace and often the same stage or venue. The most popular genres are Country and Gospel, though the other genres are regularly heard in the radio too because of the before mentioned music policy of the radio station.

Some of the artists have attempted to brand themselves for a shot at the international music scene whilst the majority of the artists clearly are producing their music primarily for the Faroese audience. This can be seen for example in the use of language in the lyrics, topic of the texts and the image or appearance they try to create of themselves.

OTHER GENRES

The musical life of the Faroes is quite diverse and the popular music and the other genres mentioned above are by no means the only musical life on the islands. Quite the contrary. Several choirs, brass bands and wind bands, a big band, The Faroese Symphony orchestra, various chamber music constellations, a thriving Music school system etc.

The Faroese composers of contemporary “classical” music are also growing in numbers. Their inspiration often derives or derived from the Faroese traditional music. But these days it is not as obvious as it was only a couple of decades ago, partly perhaps because this field is becoming a genre of its own right in the Faroes and the composers evolving from drawing most of the material they work with from traditional elements alone, and partly because the accessibility of examples of contemporary music on the internet also is influencing the Faroese composers, tempting them to “move on” so to speak, but no hopefully with their roots intact and into play when they compose, just not as obviously as before.

THE INTERVIEWS

A.

(b.1949) Born and raised in a village with less than a thousand inhabitants, on an island next to the main island of the Faroe Islands, Streymoy. He is a selftaught musician, playing guitar and bass.
Throughout his youth and teenage years he was, as so many other youngsters of that time, listening to the latest music being broadcasted from various radio stations, such as Radio Luxembourg (RTL), and pirate radio stations such as ‘Radio Caroline’ which operated from ships anchored in international waters, in order to circumvent national legislation. A and his friends would typically gather around the radio at the time of broadcasting and try to pick up the songs, having only one go at each song everytime, but as A explains: “There were so many stations to choose between, that we could very often tune into another station and be lucky to hear the same song again”. As his first music ideals A mentions Bob Dylan, and Rolling Stones first of all and to a slightly lesser degree the Beatles, “The Beatles were not rebellios enough for us” He says.

A moved to Denmark in the early seventies and lived there for some years working here and there doing a bit of playing together with his old childhood friends who had moved to Denmark at the same time. They performed locally from time to time primarily for Faroese audiences, gradually building up a repertoire. After A’s and his friends return to the Faroes they went to a studio and began to record their songs, resulting in a total of three cassette tapes released during the eighties that all became very popular. Eventually the tapes sold out, leading to the release of a CD that contains most of the songs from the tapes.

The songs that A has composed and songs he has been collaborating on have a unique quality that makes them easily recognizable; A has been hailed as the personification of a special sound, a musical dialect. The musical expression is one of laziness, rather laid back playing, always with the clean electric guitar sound and the bass present, not nessecarily with drums at all. The lyrics are invariably sung in the dialect that is very characteristic of the isl

When asked about his thoughts of our musical heritage, A instantly mentions the early faroese popular musicians, who appeared during the fifties especially Simme & ljómlið8 and Birni Dam9. He also claims a major influence coming from Regin Dahl.10

One experience stands out in A’s memory, a radio broadcast from a funeral in the village of Tjørnuvik, where the hymn singing (Kingo-singing) made a lasting impression upon him. He always has imagined this to be the old Faroese sound. Incidentally Tjørnuvik is the very same village where he grew up did not have any strong tradition regarding the old kvæði whatsoever.

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8 Simme og ljómlið, a group that were pioneers of Faroese popular music in the late fifties, responsible for several of the evergreens that are till being sung all over the Faroes.
9 Birni Dam was another of the pioneers of the faroese popular music in the fifties.
10 Regin Dahl (1918-2007) faroese author and composer, incidently the grandson of the same Georg Caspar Hansen, Bagær Hansen, mentioned earlier (p.14) as the grand old man of instrumental music in the Faroes from around the end of the 19th century.
After having been asked, more than once, about whether or not he used elements of the traditional musical heritage in his works, either deliberately, or subconsciously and realising it later, A sighs and exclaims: “I know you desperately want me to say that I did so, to make it fit into your theory, but I have to dissappoint you; I have never given it a thought in the creating process, nor have I yet found anything afterwards in my music that gives me reason to believe that I have been using it subconsciously. But I can tell you this much, not just about my music neseccarily, but in Faroese music in general, there is this melancholy which I personally think is perhaps the one thing that makes me think a song sounds Faroese.

B.

(b.1966) Born and raised in the capital of the Faroe Islands, Tórshavn. He is mostly selftaught too though his stepdad taught him his first chords on the guitar. Along with friends he formed a rock band at a very young age (13 y.o.) and a year later the group published their first of two singles with selfmade material. At the age of 17 B went to school in Denmark and during that time he began to write most of the material which he later would be using for recordings. Returning back to the Faroes B performed with various bands as the lead singer, but eventually joined a band that turned out to become the moulding form for a group of musicians who later would dominate the Faroese rock and Jazz environment, and who still are appearing frequently in various connections and genres. B claims his first influences to come from The Seekers, Peter, Paul & Mary and Bob Dylan. “later we moved on and listened to Exception, Weather Report, Peter Gabriel etc.”

B has published a couple of CD’s in his own name and some where he has been a member of a cooperative. It is safe to say that these CD’s have become famous around the islands and many of the songs that B is either the composer of or collaborator on have become national treasures.

When asked about his understanding of the musical heritage of the Faroe Islands, B’s initial response are: “The kvæði and the Kingo hymns”, but almost in the same breath he continues “And also Simm & ljömlöð(p.17) and Tey á Kamarinum12......It’s fantastic what they have done, the melodies they have created, and that’s definately with foreign inspiration, something new... the jazz elements that Simme pulls into this – I have great respect for them – all of those who came before us...” but then B continues: “If I have to have to name anything as a Faroese Musical Identity, it has to be Harkaliðiði13, It doesn’t get more Faroese than that. That’s how I feel at least”.

B tells of an experience from his start as a performing musician where he and his first band were playing at a village ball in Sumba on the island of Suðuroy. After having played a set, the band had a break and the villagers began the kvæði. The ballad was ‘Harra Pætur og

12 Another group from the fifties. ‘Tey á Kamarinum’ have been active intil recent years and many of their songs have also become classics of the popular music genre in the Faroes
13 ‘Harkaliðiði’ was a Faroese folk group from the late sixties that performed updated versions of Faroese traditional music as well as political and satirical songs.
Elinborg. B vividly remembers the moment when he and one other band member began to focus on the rhythm of the dance steps and the melody and how they sometimes did fit and sometimes seemed to clash. Also they commented to each other about the curious phenomena of harmonies in the chanting, which is unusual, because the faroes singing is generally accepted as being in unison only.

When the talk turns towards the question of whether the music of B is using Faroese traditional elements be responds that “Apart from one instance where we did put a kvæði into a song deliberately to symbolise a drunk man on our national holiday, I have not used any such stuff in my music, and I would not have recognized it as being there if it wasn’t for a danish musician who once told me that he thought that one of my songs was a typical faroese 6/8 melody. I have often been thinking about that since then......otherwise I usually think that the mood in the song is making us think a song is Faroese.... the melancholy in many of them just sounds so Faroese”

C.
(b.1974) Born and raised in a village on the main island of the Faroes. Also a mainly selftaught musician. Some informal lessons were given by a close relative that helped him along in the upstart, but since then he has been his own teacher, picking up along the way as he has been performing alongside other musicians. At the end of his teens C moved to Tórshavn and quickly established himself as guitarist and lead singer in a company with far more experienced musicians and as he claims “I owe all I know about music to those I have played with”. C has released three CD with original songs, of which he has written most himself. He does not refer to any particular group or artist as his major influences, but mentions Toto, Eagles and Bryan but his interest for sources of inspiration varies: “Only last week i wanted to study the progressive country rock band Kansas and Rush and became inspired by them”

As the talk moves over to the issue of whether the younger artists may be removed farther away from their roots than the colder artists, C says that in his opinion this desire is much stronger in the younger artists of today than in those of his own age or older. The reason for this, he claims, is that the globalisation has made everybody sound so similar that younger artist are trying to find things that will make them stand out and have their own identity.

C recognizes the existence of the musical heritage, but denies that is has had any major, if any at all, impact on his own creative work, “I have never tried to use any of the Faroese traditional musical elements in my songs, and I do not think there is anything to find even if you look for it, but you never know....”

As a curiosity C mentions that he believes the Popular music in the Faroes varies according to the geography, saying that: “even if this country is small, I believe that there is a difference from the south to the north – in the style – I think I dare to claim that”.

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14 one of the most popular kvæði in the Faroes today, rather short, only 52 verses.
MUSIC ANALYSIS

As often is the case in popular music, ownership of songs can be a bit diffuse to identify, as most of the songs come into existence as a result of collaboration between the member of the group, or the musicians in the studio. The credited artist may in some cases contribute only with a melody or a text, and then one or more persons will join in and work together until the song is finished. This procedure also makes the attempt to find out whether a specific artist is influenced by traditional music rather complex, since those who have been working together on a song have of course set their fingerprint on it, deliberately or not. So in a way it is perhaps more accurate to say that the identifiers of traditional music found in a particular song reflects back onto the team that created the song as a whole, rather than the single artist who in the end may be credited for the song.

A.

In all, 30 of A’s productions have been examined.

29 of these are in a traditional major key, with a few exceptions that are in the Mixolydian e.g. with the minor seventh. One song is in the Dorian mode.

The melodies are in general simple, built upon stacked triads, a pentatonic structure with or without notes added, the Mixolydian scale, or a blues scale with the minor seventh. The song in Dorian mode stands a bit out apart from the rest of A’s songs, The melody makes use of fifth jumps and the major sixth is noticeable, a melancholic ballad.

Sometimes the intro or the interlude in the middle of the song can seem to point toward some modal tendencies, but this disappears as soon as the verse begins again.

25 of the songs are in 4/4 time and three are in either 3/4 or 6/8 time. Throughout, the rhythm is not the most important factor, apart from the establishing of a groove that makes the songs move. In some songs the drum set is more dominant and in other songs it is barely present at all. The voices and the bas and guitar are the essence of the music.

The laid back character of the music calls for simplicity and relaxed an atmosphere. The rare occurrence of sophisticated use of rhythm or instruments is very subtle and very likely the result of the presence of one or more of the musical workhorses mentioned below.

B.

A total of 30 songs and have been examined. 17 of these are in a traditional major key, 10 in a natural minor key and 3 are in the Dorian mode.
Most of the songs that are in traditional major modes show only a few or no melodic traits that can be said to point towards traditional music. It is safe to say that most of the song do not lend much of their character to the traditional music although the melancholic nature of some of the more quiet songs may be a kind of Faroese mood by some. But the identifiers mentioned above are not many in the songs in the major keys. On the other hand, in the songs in built around the minor modes, both the natural (Aeolian) and Dorian a number of identifiers can be found. Fifth and fourth jumps, one example of the ending 2-T and 7-T each, and the 7-T-2-T three note pattern. While his melodies can be almost modal in character, B also makes use, as the only of the three artists in this study, of chromatic melody lines. One example is where he is singing in consecutive order the notes b-a#-a in one and the same bar, a series not very usual in popular music. In contrast, later in the same song we meet one of the most modal passages that B has recorded.

22 songs are in standard 4/4 time. A couple of them are played in shuffle style giving triplet feel to the music. Two songs show rhythmical variations with the use of 4+3+4+3 meter and 3+4 meter. And finally 7 songs are in either 3/4 or 6/8. This implementation of rhythmical variation, compared with the all rest of the songs in this study, suggest that it has been used very deliberately, the question is only whether the musicians were trying to make a tribute to the traditional music, or groups like Yes, Genesis or Camel.

C.

Out of the 23 songs from artist C, 14 songs are in a major key and nine in a natural minor key. 20 songs are in 4/4 time and three are in 6/8 time or feel. The general impression of this music is one of polished rock, with an edge. The music is smooth and the structure of the songs are laid out in the same manner. The ballads and the 6/8 time songs are of course different, but even they seem to be structured according to some template. Rhythmical changes inside each song, apart from basic standard breaks etc. is almost not existing.

There are a few identifiable melodic elements such as leaps of fifths and three note patterns. A couple of rhythmic examples with the short notes on the accented beats do occur. The melancholic nature of the songs in 6/8 leans a bit towards the Faroese mood, subjectively speaking, and it is in these songs that most of the identifiers are to be found.

There is not much in the harmonies, melodies or the structures of the songs that indicates C making conscious use of elements from the traditional music. Out of the three artists participating in this research, C has the most international “sound”, or perhaps its more accurate to say that he is sounding more authentic compared to the genres that his music seems to belong to. Out of the three he therefore is least recognizable in an international context.

The hints of the above mentioned elements of traditional Faroese music may be accidental, and may indeed have been implemented subconsciously because of the cultural roots, but is too scarce to make any proof, one way or the other.
THE MUSICAL WORKHORSES

A word or two has to be said about the basic group of musicians that B is surrounding himself with; These musicians are the same musical workhorses in all his three CDs. These are old friends from childhood. They have been making music together during almost four decades. At the same time, they have been active independently in countless other projects and in any genre imaginable, which has over time made these five persons into a living database that can bring into any project that they are part of a lot of experience and ideas, and perhaps influence the project much more than what one would have imagined possible.

In such a small community as the Faroes it goes without saying that on or two of these workhorses inevitably are participating on almost any Faroese recording from the late eighties and up till now, and therefore they are also present on the productions of artist A and C, but not as the basic group as in the productions of B, rather as an individual studio musician, and therefore not as influential, perhaps.

CONCLUSION

When looking into modern popular music, searching for evidence of the old, it is important to keep in mind that the traditional Faroese music is monophonic, only accompanied by the dance and the rhythmic feel of the steps of the dance. Thus there is no tradition for any harmonization whatsoever. The kingo singing may be in a special situation here, because it was originally presented to the Faroese sung from a book, a graduale by a minister or someone who may have had harmonic knowledge. However, the hymns were sung in the Faroes for the next centuries without accompaniment, so the importance of that origin may be overrated. This means that when we listen to popular music looking for evidence of ancient remains, the identifiers will be the same – from the same “coherent musical universe”.

As expected, most of the 83 songs analyzed are based upon the major/minor system with heavy influence from diatonic modes, mainly the Dorian, Aeolian and the Mixolydian scales. The pentatonic scales are common, sometimes with an added note, like the minor 7th, in one occasion or two, and one of the songs is purely pentatonic. The melody lines may jump up or down in thirds, fourths and fifths, giving the feeling of ethnicity or modality.

Chromatic treatment of the songs is very rare, and when it appears, the reason is revealed by looking at who is participating in the recording. Musicians with a Jazz, or fusion history seem to be more eager to play with the chromatics than a musician with rock or blues background.

Rhythmically some of the melodies have some common traits. Triplets and syncopations can be seen regularly. Also there are a number of occurrences of where the shorter note value is in front of the longer note for example an eight note in front of a quarter note in an eight

15 Thomas Kingo’s “Gradual” published in Odense in 1699 as melody supplement to his hymn book published also in 1699.
triplet. One song makes use of changing meters such as 4/4+3/4+4/4+3/4 (4+3+4+3) both in the verse itself and in the instrumental part between the two first lines of the verse, possibly pointing to the occurrence in many kvæði verses\textsuperscript{16}.

The connection between the artists and the inspiration drawn from the Faroese musical tradition is for the largest part not a visible one. It must be concluded that the musical traces found, in some cases can be debatable and in other cases can be rather solid. The obvious exception are the songs by B where his musicians play around with rhythms, meters and melodies in a way that demonstrate that they can easily implement the faroese traditional music in any way that fits the need in that particular situation. These are clear examples of deliberate use of elements of the musical heritage.

The interviewees’ references to the pioneers of Faroese Rock’n Roll and popular music from the fifties as their main source of inspiration or rolemodels, may seem to undermine my claim of the old Faroese musical traditions as being present in the current popular music, since those pioneers were looking out and away from the faroes and trying very hard not to use anything at all that would remind about the traditional music. But the interviewees do not deny any traces of their cultural inheritance being present in their music, only that they are not aware of it and that they have not implemented it consciously.

The music that the interviewees have created either on their own or in collaboration with others, may at one moment appear to be indistinguishable from similar music made in countries, that we like to compare ourself, and the next it may sound as if it is riddled with small elements of old skjaldur and kvæði. In order to make any conclusive claims on this matter, more research is needed.

If this study had been approached differently, taking into consideration the significance of collaboration – the teamwork that takes place in the creation of popular music, it might have delivered data that could have been interpreted in a better way.

Subjectively speaking it is often the case that a native Faroese can, when hearing a song on the radio for example, suddenly get the feeling of something ancient, or something Faroese being present without being able to put a finger on what exactly it is that awakens these emotions. This could be investigated in a qualitative study based on interviews of the users, the consumers of the Faroese popular music.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

Here at the end, some thoughts that have matured during this project shall be mentioned.

In order to facilitate future research projects in the fields of Musicology and Ethnomusicology in the Faroes, I suggest that resources are put into two areas.

First. There is an urgent need of thorough study of the musical theory behind the Faroese traditional music. The ideas, theory and thoughts that Marianne Clausen and those before her

\textsuperscript{16} See summary (p.12)
put forward regarding the Faroese music is only the starting point and invites to further research.

Second. I believe it would be most rewarding to map out the landscape of Faroese popular music for the last 30 years or more. By mapping out I mean creating a database with information about Faroese artists, bands, musicians, songs, concerts, recordings, producers and technicians who have been active during this period. The Faroes are such a tiny society compared to most other nations that it will be a task within reach to collect the information needed.

And finally, after having spent some time in the volumes of our documented musical heritage, it struck me that we ought to do the same with the Faroese popular music from the last sixty years – simply transcribing it from a to z. This could be done in connection with the mapping suggested above. Compared to documenting the ancient musical heritage, there is a huge difference – most of the composers and original performers are still alive and the original versions are on record.

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